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## Unfortunate Victim of School Cuts

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While the school budget approved for Appomattox County in the coming year is only 7 percent less than what is being spent on education this year, the program cuts forced by the Board of Supervisors should be getting some attention from county residents.

The School Board approved a budget of \$18.7 million for the new year that begins July 1. That's about 7 percent less than the \$20.2 million that is being spent this year. The reduced budget amount appears to be in line with reductions other school systems in the region have had to make to their new budgets in this year of reduced state spending.

But look where school officials made the cuts. The new budget eliminates sports programs at Appomattox Middle School, pre-school classes for 4-year-olds at the primary school and cuts 20 positions from the budget, some of which will be reflected in layoffs for the new school year.

But the most cruel cut of all was elimination of the adult education program. That's an unconscionable cut that needs to be revisited by both the supervisors and the School Board.

Adult education teacher Mary Jo Pulliam said she blamed the supervisors, not school officials, for the loss of the program. That's because the School Board originally asked the supervisors for \$4.3 million in local money for the school budget, but the supervisors cut nearly \$722,000 from that request.

Some \$200,000 of that cut was restored when the supervisors found additional money in the overall county budget. That still left a \$500,000 difference between what the School Board asked for and what the supervisors approved for school spending.

The budget cut left a number of School Board members, teachers and other school officials shaking their heads after last week's meeting when the budget was approved.

Pulliam pointed out that the adult education program helps county residents, some of whom are laid-off furniture factory workers, earn general education diplomas or acquire other skills that could lead them to new jobs. In some cases, those new skills could include learning how to read.

"My students are some of the ones who pay some of the taxes and they are going to be left out in the cold," Pulliam said. "I have no idea what their options will be. They are adults most at need," she added.

They are adults who turn to the school system's education program to better themselves and improve their livelihoods and the lives of their families. They are also workers who pay taxes, as Pulliam said, and who make other contributions to the county.

It was the School Board in the end that made the cut to the adult education program. It could have retained the adult education program and cut some other item in the budget.

But the Board of Supervisors is not blameless in this untimely cut to the school budget. The two boards need to dig a little deeper into the county's finances and come up with the money to retain a program that benefits adults who need to continue their education. It's not only the right thing to do for those adults who would benefit, but it's the right thing to do for Appomattox County residents and taxpayers.

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